



DISTANCE AND THE DESIRE FOR KNOWLEDGE

*The Farther Soldiers Wander The More Questions
They Seem To Ask*

IT would be unfair, and perhaps untrue, to suggest that the farther a soldier is from his base the more interested he is in education. But it is a fact that the troops on Vella Lavella are a long way from their base, and at least one man in eight of them (we were told by Lieut. Congalton, who is in charge of the work there) is taking a regular course of study under the Army Education and Welfare Scheme. Most armies are satisfied if five per cent of their personnel go voluntarily to A.E.W.S. courses. That is the figure aimed at in Britain. But the figure achieved on Vella Lavella is 12½ per cent, and there is, of course, no kind of coercion or even pressure.

No Formal Lectures

In a combat zone, there is little opportunity for the organisation of

formal discussions. Current affairs bulletins, usually known as CABS, are received and circulated among all those anxious to study them; they are discussed and argued about; they may even lead to systematic courses of study. But that is incidental and not pre-arranged. Normally, bulletins are just an aid to conversation in huts and tents and dug-outs. If you have read one on China you have an advantage over the other fellow when China provokes an argument. If you have all read one, your argument will be more factual, and therefore more rational and useful. But you do not read in order to argue. You read for information, because you desire information, or because time is heavy on your hands and it seems better to you to ease the burden usefully.

Vocational education, on the other hand, proceeds systematically. Some

men have done practical things all their lives without knowing why—the average artisan or farmer. Others have wanted, or supposed that they wanted, to do something else—a clerk who has dreamed of keeping bees, or a fruit-farmer who has envied an accountant. Army education fills in the picture for both groups. The courses of study it provides—usually in a brightly-written, attractively-printed series of lessons—are a technical school for the tradesman, a commercial school for the businessman, a school of agriculture for the man on the land.

We saw a typical farming course, and noted with interest that it had been prepared by the staff of Canterbury Agricultural College. It was clearer, brighter, more interesting to look at and

(continued on next page)

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